

Cancer Care

Patient Newsletter

by Patient & Family Counselling & Psychiatry Services



BC Cancer Agency

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

February 2017

STRESS & CANCER

Welcome to our Winter edition of Cancer Care, a Patient Newsletter brought to you by Psychosocial Oncology, Patient & Family Counselling and Psychiatry Services.

This issue will focus on providing information and resources to help you cope with distressful thoughts and feelings that may come up when you are first diagnosed with cancer, during treatment, and beyond. We are here to help you learn the skills needed to manage your life with cancer

We hope you learn something new or are challenged to share something with others who are going through a cancer experience.



"The meditation program changed my life and gave me tools to manage stress, to live in the moment and to not worry about the future."

(Patient quote shared with permission)



Editor:

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- RELAXATION & MINDFULNESS-BASED PROGRAMS
- NEW RESEARCH ON ANXIETY & CANCER
- PUBLIC EVENT—DOES STRESS CAUSE CANCER?

RELAXATION AND MINDFULNESS- BASED PROGRAMS

Quick Relaxation Technique:

- Find a quiet place, turn your phone off
- Find a comfortable position that you can maintain (sitting or lying down)
- Take a full deep breath and hold it for a count of ten.
- Release and let your whole body go completely limp.



By Sarah Sample and Melanie McDonald, Patient & Family Counselling Services

People living with cancer often experience intense emotional upheaval. Coping with difficult emotions, pain, uncertainty and loss of sleep are common experiences reported.

Relaxation techniques have been documented to help people deal with stress and distress. The goal of relaxation is to experience the “Relaxation Response” which produces a state of mental and physical tranquility. The term Relaxation Response was coined by Dr. Herbert Benson in the late 1970’s. Benson noted the physiological effects of relaxation from his experiments with transcendental meditation which include: a reduction in oxygen consumption, decreased heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure; decrease in lactic acid levels and cortisol levels, decrease in arousal of the sympathetic nervous system. The experience is often one of calm and well-being.

There are numerous kinds of relaxation techniques including breath work, guided imager/visualization, muscle release, and body scan (bringing awareness to each part of the body). The Relaxation Program at BCCA centres offer guidance in each of these techniques.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is different than relaxation but offers some of the same benefits. MBSR is a systematic approach to being in the ‘present moment.’ MBSR is a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western techniques to help cultivate wisdom, awareness and insight. Its object is not to fix or cure but to connect with what is most vital in our lives.

The MBSR 8 week program is offered at some cancer centres through the Patient and Family Counselling Department (PFC). Contact your centre for more information.

RESEARCH NEWS

The Vancouver Sun recently profiled research into the relationship between anxiety and mortality for lung cancer patients (*January 24, 2017*)

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:

Anxiety after diagnosis predicts lung-cancer specific and overall survival in patients with stage III non-small cell lung cancer. A population-based cohort study.

LEAD AUTHOR:

Andrea Vodermaier, UBC post doctoral fellow

OBJECTIVE: Examines associations of anxiety, depression and mortality in a lung cancer population.

CONCLUSION: Demonstrated associations of anxiety with mortality, adding to the evidence that psychosocial factors might play a role in disease progression in this group.

Click here [read the full article go online to Journal of Pain and Symptom Management.](#)
January 2017

Commentary by Dr. Alan Bates, *Provincial Practice Leader for Psychiatry, BC Cancer Agency*



The research study by Vodermaier and colleagues (2017) is a great example of how the BC Cancer Agency has been at the forefront of screening for distress and collecting data about depression and anxiety for many years. It remains a high priority for us to identify patients who are struggling with emotional distress in order to offer them psychosocial support.

You may be wondering what this study means regarding your own cancer and whether your own anxiety or depression may put you at increased risk. It is very common for us to hear from patients their beliefs that their cancer was caused by having a stressful job or how they worry that they must keep a positive attitude to prevent their cancer from coming back. However, based on the evidence, emotions **do not** play a convincing role in causing or worsening cancer.

It is important to remember two things about the relationship between anxiety and cancer mortality suggested in this research. First, just because two things are associated with each other does not mean that one caused the other in a particular order. This factor was discussed by the researchers in qualifying their results. Maybe patients with worsening cancer had more symptoms and those symptoms were making them feel more anxious, but it was the cancer progression that led to sooner death? Even if anxiety does play a kind of causal role, it could be an indirect one.

Second, "statistical significance" is not the same thing as "clinical significance". For example, a study might show that taking a certain drug every day of your life increases your life span by 30 seconds (statistical significance). However, most people would not want to take a daily medication with possible side effects for the chance of achieving an extra 30 seconds of life (it's not clinically significant).

In short, the study demonstrates the high-level work being done to try to answer complicated questions that make a big difference to patients. However, the jury is still out on whether anxiety or depression hastens cancer progression. Having said this, if you are feeling anxious or depressed, please access our services. We are here to help.

RESOURCES

FEATURED RESOURCES

Free handouts about:

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Deep Breathing Exercises
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Symptoms of depression
- Symptoms of grief and managing loss
- Tips for managing stress
- Strategies to help with sleep
- Positive thinking strategy
- Strategies for memory and attention
- Steps to problem solving

and more ...

Click here and visit
Emotional Support
Resources

www.bccancer.bc.ca
(Emotional Support)



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Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology
Association Canadienne d'Oncologie Psychosociale

FREE PUBLIC EVENT

“Does Stress Cause Cancer?”

Featuring a panel of Cancer Care professionals, including medical and alternative perspectives.

May 3rd at 7pm

- Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront,

1133 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

Support Group Calendars :

- [Abbotsford Cancer Centre](#)
- [Centre for the North](#)
- [Centre for the Southern Interior Centre](#)
- [Fraser Valley Cancer Centre](#)
- [Vancouver Cancer Centre](#)
- [Vancouver Island Cancer Centre](#)

The Emotional Facts of Life with Cancer (booklet)

Download:

<http://capo.ca/docs/bookletREVISED.pdf>

The Emotional
Facts of
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